



Inter-Parliamentary Union
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Address by the IPU Secretary General, Mr. Martin Chungong, on the occasion of the 37th ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly General Assembly

Nay Pyi Taw, 30 September 2016

It is a pleasure for me to participate in this 37th session of your Assembly. I bring you greetings from the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the global organization of parliaments, of which almost all of your national parliaments present here today are full-fledged members.

I wish, first of all, to extend my heartfelt thanks to the Union Assembly of Republic of the Union of Myanmar, and its leadership, for their warm hospitality. I am very pleased to visit, for the first time, your country and to be able to witness the considerable progress that has been achieved in your transition to democracy over the past several years. Since 2013, the IPU has been privileged to collaborate with the Union Assembly in its development. The Deputy Speaker of Myanmar alluded to this in his statement just now. I confirm that we are committed to pursuing that cooperation. In so doing, I can also confirm the commitment of UNDP to continuing the fruitful partnership we have developed in support of the Parliament.

The launch of the ASEAN Community of opportunities in 2015, which promotes one vision, one identity, one community, is a testament to how far the ASEAN Member States have progressed in forging unity of identity, destiny and purpose. I wish it every success in its efforts to become a Community that is “politically cohesive, economically integrated, and socially responsible”.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of this Assembly: a vibrant AIPA for a progressive ASEAN, could not have been better chosen, given the context of our times. We meet at a moment when democracy is facing manifold challenges, indeed is under relentless assault. These challenges require of all of us to redouble our efforts, refrain from complacency and strive to be deserving of the trust and confidence reposed in us as the people’s representatives.

From this perspective, I am sure that in your deliberations you will be mindful of the fact that parliaments, as the pillars of democracy, have a crucial role to play in giving voice to the people – all people. For them to fulfil that role effectively, they must meet a number of criteria as laid out by the IPU and endorsed by your parliaments. They must be inclusive, open and transparent, accessible and accountable. Above and beyond this, parliaments must be tolerant, serve as the guardians of human rights and the rule of law and act as peacemakers.

It goes without saying therefore that parliament must be the embodiment of society and it can only realize and achieve its full potential as a unique platform for dialogue, mediation of the diverse interests of society, and action in a context of respect and trust, with the full participation of all sectors of society - men and women, and youth. But it is not just about numbers: the quality of representation is equally important. In other words, true opportunities must be offered for all these groups to participate

effectively and fully in the proceedings of parliament, to articulate the interests of the cross-section of society and not just certain segments thereof. This is what a truly representative and inclusive parliament means.

I hasten to point out that democracy is not just an end in itself; it is and should be a means, an instrument, a vehicle for achieving an end. In this regard, you will allow me to quote from the words of the President of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar in a recent message he gave on the occasion of International Day of Democracy, 15 September 2016: "The success of the democratization of a country is measured by the well-being of its people". As politicians, we must help shape and implement policies that can bring about changes that are people-oriented and people-centred.

In 2015, the world community concluded three major transformative UN-driven agreements that seek to eradicate poverty and bring social, economic and environmental development on a sustainable path in just 15 years. These are Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The global agenda provides a golden opportunity for democracy and the pillars thereof that are parliaments, to prove that they continue to be relevant. Indeed, this agenda recognizes the prominent role parliaments are going to play in its implementation, through law-making, budget resourcing and ensuring accountability by the executive arm of government.

Knowing full well how pivotal the SDGs were going to be, very early on, the IPU began to organize a parliamentary input to the United Nations so that the goals would include the views of parliamentarians. The perspectives of parliaments and parliamentarians from across the globe have indeed enriched the formulation and articulation of the SDGs

The IPU believes that the aspirations for a fairer world set out in the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development will only be met if there is more democracy worldwide. As we all embark on the implementation of this Agenda, I am sure you will continue to work to ensure that your parliaments are strong and fit for purpose. I would like to use this opportunity to state the IPU's commitment to working with you to help your parliaments live up to their responsibilities as the legitimate representatives of the people. We will do our level best, in particular, to help you mainstream this agenda into national policies and plans.

This is all the more imperative today as peoples' expectations of their leaders are evolving. Parliaments and parliamentarians need to be attuned to people and respond to their needs. They also need to be more proactive in addressing those needs. In short, they are challenged to deliver.

Furthermore, I cannot stress enough the important role parliaments and their members can play as messengers of peace. As leaders, it is your duty to be the torch-bearers of peace, to be the voice of moderation, and to serve as role models in your societies. The instant nature of communications today is a powerful tool for conveying the message of peace and dialogue instead of hatred and violence. Every word you utter, every action you take is heard and witnessed almost instantaneously across the country, region and world and has the potential to heal just as it can fan the flames of conflict.

In sum, I need not remind you that parliaments are important symbols: they provide a critical forum for leadership and serve as a safe house for the rule of law and human rights. In order to function independently and effectively, parliaments need to be political spaces where the peoples' representatives can speak and act without fear of prosecution and persecution. By the same token, parliamentarians must hold themselves up to the highest standards of probity and integrity. In other words, the law must protect parliaments and parliamentarians but they should also not be perceived

to be above the law. We were very pleased this morning to hear Her Excellency the State Councillor state this point categorically in her keynote address.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I encourage you to nurture and keep democracy alive and well in South-East Asia through your national and regional parliaments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, your global organisation, will continue to accompany you every step of the way.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you.